

ALBERTA FISH AND WILDLIFE

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INTRODUCTION

L.J. COOKE
ASSISTANT
DEPUTY MINISTER

It is fitting for me, as the new Assistant Deputy Minister of the Fish and Wildlife Division, to offer a few words to the 59th Annual Conference of the Alberta Fish and Game Association. I welcome this opportunity and I look forward to working with you as we strive to maintain and enhance Alberta's fish and wildlife resources both for today and into the future.

The mission of the Fish and Wildlife Division is "to manage the fish and wildlife resources of the province for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." In this regard, the collective efforts of many Albertans in 1987 were reflected in Wildlife '87. The wildlife centennial celebrations, projects and promotional events promoted public interest and awareness in wildlife, which I intend to continue, with your help, in 1988 and beyond.

Many of these projects involve fish and wildlife habitat, with the express desire to acquire, establish and maintain adequate areas to sustain our fish and wildlife resources.

As a means to support these initiatives you should know that in 1986 sportsmen, through the purchase of game licences, contributed \$1 149 000 to the Buck for Wildlife Program and \$882 000 to the Wildlife Support Program. Many of these same sportsmen bought fishing licences and contributed an additional \$705 000 to the Buck for Wildlife Program.

It is my intention that the division will continue to co-operate with your Association to expand Buck for Wildlife projects. Dividends are being received.

I am gratified to learn that through your efforts, you have continued to make the Use Respect and the Outdoor Observer initiatives very effective and worthwhile. To this end, I look forward to your continued support and to your keeping me informed on suggestions to improve this work.

In addition, I look forward to your active involvement in the new Fishing Education Program. As you will recall, when the Fish and Wildlife Division redrafted the Conservation and Hunter Education Manual in 1980, a promise was made to develop a separate fishing program. It gives me great pleasure to announce this program to you at this conference.

Within the Fish and Wildlife Division you should know that I intend to emphasize communication and extend this objective outside the division with the Alberta Fish and Game Association and other client groups. As part of my drive, I am embarking on a one division/one mission strategy. This is my commitment to sound, long-range fisheries and wildlife management in this province. Again, to do this will involve co-operation and sharing with the Alberta Fish and Game Association and others. I look forward to having your help with this mutually beneficial challenge.



FISH AND WILDLIFE DIVISION

In administering the province's fish and wildlife resources, the Fish and Wildlife Division's goal is to provide the greatest benefit and enjoyment to Albertans.

The division's overall mandate is spelled out in the Fish and Wildlife Policy for Alberta, published in 1982, which was the first formal, comprehensive position taken by any government on fish and wildlife resources.

Recognizing that fish and wildlife are replenishable Crown resources, the policy says the provincial government's primary concern is to ensure that fish and wildlife populations are maintained and that these resources are passed on to future generations. The Fish and Wildlife Division, acting on the government's behalf, is charged with this responsibility. In carrying out its role, it works closely with numerous private groups concerned with fish and wildlife, as well as with other government agencies.

Functions of the Fish and Wildlife Division are carried out through seven branches — Fisheries Management, Wildlife Management, Habitat Management, Operations, Enforcement Services, Regulations Development, and Program Support (Fig. 1). The responsibilities of each branch are briefly described below.

Fisheries Management Branch

The Fisheries Management Branch develops policies and programs for fisheries on a provincial basis. It is responsible for fisheries management, research, investigations, stocking of water bodies, and initial preparation of all fisheries legislation. The branch also administers all fish hatcheries in the province.

Wildlife Management Branch

Responsibility for all matters relating to wildlife management rests with this branch. The focus is primarily on policy and program development, evaluation of wildlife programs on a provincial basis, research, and the development of wildlife management plans. The branch administers all fur management programs, including trapline compensation.

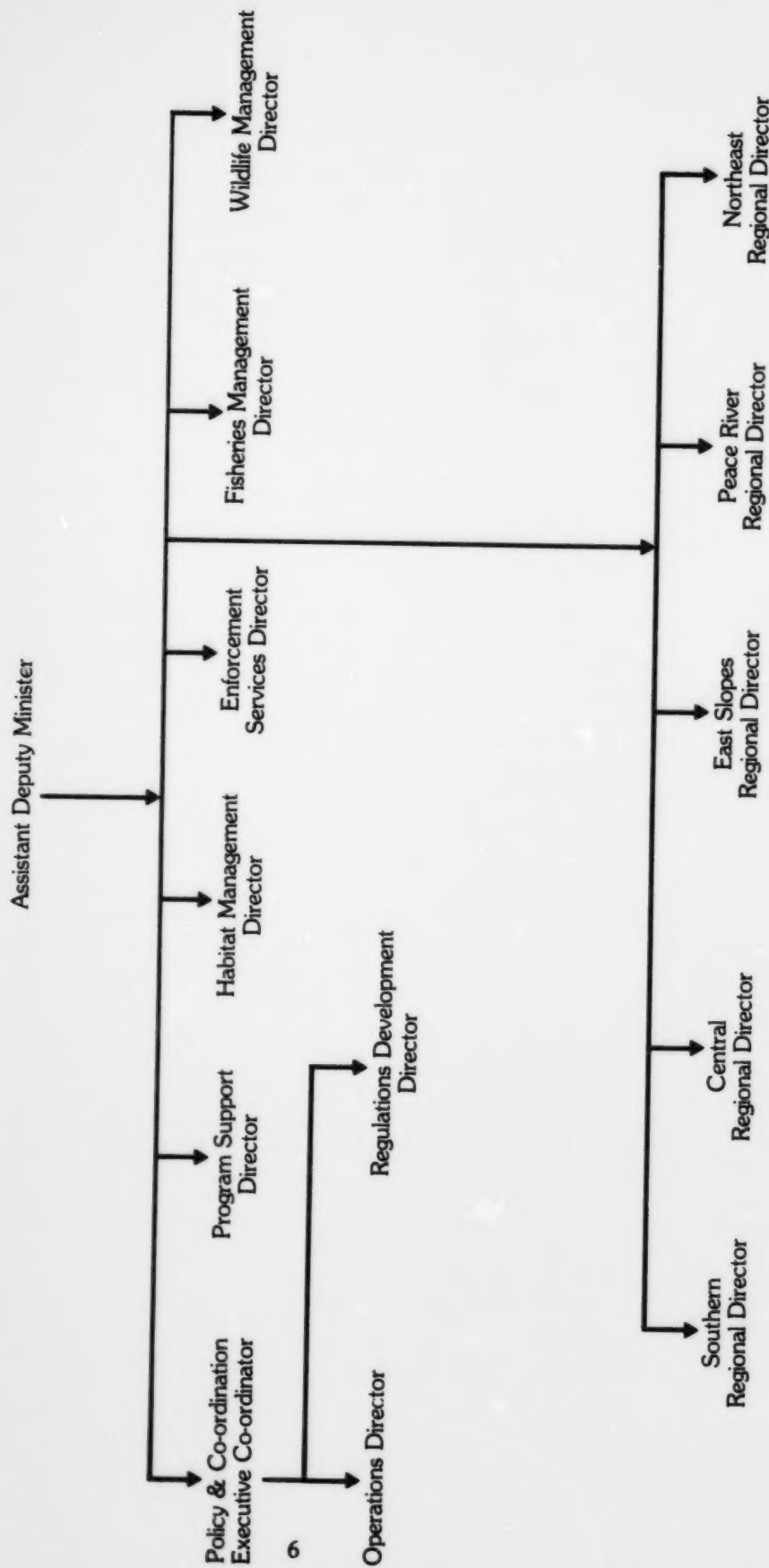


Fig. 1 FISH AND WILDLIFE DIVISION — ORGANIZATION CHART

Habitat Management Branch

This branch implements a variety of projects aimed at developing, retaining and enhancing habitat throughout the province. These projects are carried out under such programs as Buck for Wildlife, and Wetlands for Tomorrow and, with expenditures primarily for capital projects designed to provide long-term habitat improvements. The branch also establishes habitat goals and policies, approves funding, prepares publications and co-ordinates land acquisition.

Operations Branch

This branch co-ordinates the operations of five regional offices and 62 district offices. It also implements policies, programs and procedures in all operations relating to resource programs at the regional level. In addition, it provides special investigations, forensic capability, specialized training of field staff, and native liaison/problem wildlife programs on a provincial level.

Enforcement Services Branch

Developing policies and programs to enforce laws and regulations pertaining to fish and wildlife is the major responsibility of this branch, which strives to ensure consistency in how the law is interpreted, applied and administered.

Regulations Development

Responsible for the development and maintenance of provincial and federal legislation pertaining to fish, wildlife and small water vessels. This Branch also ensures divisional policy and regulatory procedures are consistent with legislation.

Program Support Branch

Under a reorganization carried out in 1987, this branch was amalgamated with the Resource Economics and Assessment Section and the Public Information and Extension Branch. Its responsibilities include administering all licensing, providing financial administration and control, co-ordinating policies and programs, assessing cost effectiveness of programs, determining the value of fish and wildlife resources, preparation of informational material and conservation education programs.

In 1987-88, the budget for the Fish and Wildlife Division totalled \$22 845 516. The allocation of fiscal and human resources for the year is shown in Table 1.

The division's major activities during 1987 are highlighted in this Annual Review under four program areas: Fisheries, Wildlife, Habitat, and Enforcement.

Table I
ALLOCATION OF FISCAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Programs	Budget		Human Resources	
	Approved	% of Divisional Total	Approved Expenditure	% of Program Budget
Program Support Includes the office of the Assistant Deputy Minister, Resource Economics and Assessment, Extension Services and Regional Administration Services	\$ 7 253 955	31.8	\$ 4 029 214	56.0
Wildlife Management Includes Brooks Hatchery	\$ 3 685 289	16.1	\$ 2 367 549	64.2
Fisheries Management Includes Allison Creek, Calgary, Caroline, Cold Lake Hatcheries	\$ 3 601 661	15.8	\$ 2 297 002	63.8
Enforcement Services	\$ 5 670 667	24.8	\$ 4 106 828	72.4
Habitat Management	\$ 1 954 161	8.6	\$ 1 445 358	74.0
Operations	\$ 582 486	2.5	\$ 288 109	49.5
Regulations Development	\$ 97 297	0.4	\$ 87 828	90.3
TOTAL	\$22 845 516	100.00	\$14 621 888	64.0



FISHERIES

New sport fishing regulations designed to increase angling opportunities while ensuring viable fish populations came into effect on April 1, 1987.

The regulations, which divided the province into eight Fish Management Areas (FMAs), cover five main categories: catch and possession limits, size limits, bait restrictions, water body closures, and licensing.

Reductions in the catch and possession limits were introduced with the aim of spreading the potential catch among more anglers, while new minimum size limits give fish an opportunity to spawn at least once before being removed, and prohibition of bait in certain FMAs should ensure the survival of undersized fish. The fishing harvest is spread over a greater number of streams under the new arrangement for opening Eastern Slopes streams every year (with spring closures). All sport fishing, regardless of equipment used, now comes under one licence — the Sport Fishing Licence, except the Sturgeon Fishing Licence and the Trophy Water Licence.

Projects were undertaken to evaluate new trout management programs for three Eastern Slopes streams — Dutch Creek, Onion Creek and the upper watershed of the McLeod River.

Eleven lakes were stocked with 14.2 million walleye, including a 10 per cent return to the three lakes from which eggs were taken. Also 6 852 767 trout were stocked in 302 lakes, with rainbow trout making up 70 per cent of the total. Other species included brown, brook, lake and cutthroat trout.

Development of the walleye fingerling rearing program continued at Lac La Biche and Cold Lake, and over 868 000 fingerlings were planted in seven lakes as part of the walleye restoration program.

A total of 86 930 Arctic grayling were stocked in six lakes, and nine lakes received 102 650 yellow perch to develop new populations.

Also, with the aim of starting a new population, 1 985 adult lake whitefish were transplanted from Pigeon Lake to Sylvan Lake. The whitefish will provide a forage species for pike and walleye to improve their growth. When the whitefish population develops, it may provide ice fishing opportunities in Sylvan Lake.

On May 23, more than 200 persons attended the official opening of the \$10.6 million Cold Lake Fish Hatchery, which is the fifth fish culture facility in the province (the others: Sam Livingston Fish Hatchery, Calgary; Allison Brood Trout Station, Coleman; Raven Brood Trout Station, Caroline; Sundance Trout Rearing Station, Wabamun). The Cold Lake Hatchery will annually raise between 16 and 25 million walleye fry and 200 000 walleye fingerlings, plus 1.4 million rainbow trout and 550 000 lake trout.

During the year the first production rearing and planting cycle for lake trout was completed from The Cold Lake Hatchery, with the trout averaging 20 per cent greater growth than previously achieved.

A virus disease from wild lake trout brought into The Cold Lake Fish Hatchery required the disinfection of the facility late in 1987. Production is anticipated to recommence within a month as soon as the facility is verified virus-free.

In commercial fishing, regulations covering the new licencing system came into effect on April 1, and a program was initiated to monitor the monthly sales of commercial fishing licences and commercial fishing lake licences.

The 1986/87 commercial harvest totalled 2.9 million kg, with a value of \$2.7 million to fishermen — a decline of .3 million kg and \$100 000 from the previous year. Fishing licence sales totalled 2 333, made up of 1 526 zone and 807 zone commercial fishermen.



WILDLIFE

In big game management, a draft Wolf Management Plan recommended increased fur trapping and hunting harvests of wolves to provide relief to certain threatened or declining populations of hoofed animals. A video prepared on the Nordegg wolf project shows wolf predation as the major limiting factor in that region's declining elk population.

Grizzly bear data were analyzed and incorporated into the background section of the draft Grizzly Bear Management Plan. Results are being monitored in the baiting of black bears in those Wildlife Management Units (WMU) without grizzly bears.

In an attempt to manage elk populations causing chronic crop depredation, a special elk hunt was introduced in WMU 104 along the Montana border.

Bird game management saw Alberta, in co-operation with the other prairie provinces and four U.S. flyways, continue its hunting restrictions to reduce harvest of mallards and total ducks by 25 per cent. Over 1000 resident Canada Geese were trapped and banded, and some goslings with adults were moved onto habitat improvement projects in central Alberta.

About 35 000 fully grown pheasants were released during autumn in southern and central Alberta to provide more hunting opportunities. Additional pheasant release sites for put-and-take hunting were established in the Camrose, Stettler and Wanham areas.

Local fish and game clubs again maintained winter feeding sites for wild turkeys, with the possibility of a spring gobbler hunt in the future being considered.

Approximately 40 000 big game hunters and 10 000 game bird hunters were telephoned following the 1986 hunting season in an attempt to estimate game harvest by recreational hunters.

Fur bearer management saw attendance at basic trapper education courses decrease to 268 from 344 the previous year. Four advanced courses were given to the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs to provide leadership training. A major review of the Trapper Compensation Program was undertaken and summarized.

Research and development in the area of humane trapping systems remained a high priority. Four manuscripts summarized the results of a 1985-87 program of field testing leg-snares and modified leg-hold traps for coyotes, and a major manuscript was published for planning further research into developing improved trapping systems.

New management measures were introduced to protect the lynx — total closure of trapping in southern Alberta and a one-lynx-per-trapping-area quota in the north. These regulatory changes were in response to a request by the Alberta Trappers' Association and followed discussions with trapper interest groups.

A small-scale pilot study assessed opinions of registered fur managers to determine relative abundance/trends in a wide range of wildlife species. A province-wide questionnaire was used in the fall of 1987 and data from it are being analyzed.

In nongame management, the Woodland Caribou Provincial Restoration Plan was completed and distributed to the public. This plan recommends strategies to recover declining caribou populations through public awareness, habitat management and enforcement activities, as well as an enhanced population inventory program. Wolf management is recommended as one of the strategies for the Willmore-Grande Cache herd.

Work continues in co-operation with the Canadian Wildlife Service and the University of Calgary to reintroduce the swift fox to southern Alberta. Since 1983, a total of 116 foxes have been released.

Monitoring of the peregrine falcon shows that pesticide levels in their eggs are decreasing, although some prey species contain levels of concern. A total of 23 young (15 natural and eight captive-raised) were successfully fledged by seven breeding pairs.

The three-year survey of the burrowing owl continued, while a province-wide survey of the ferruginous hawk was conducted to determine population levels and trends. Findings in the latter survey indicate an increase of 700 pairs of hawks since 1982.

Five agreements regarding volunteer rehabilitative care for sick, injured or orphaned raptors were entered into with individuals and institutions. Approximately 400 birds were received, with 146 of them being released.

As part of the Wildlife '87 observation, a new program called "Prairie for Tomorrow" was announced by then-Minister Hon. Don Sparrow and the World Wildlife Fund — Canada. This program, to begin in 1988, will focus on securing key sites and habitat for threatened wildlife. Provincial management plans will be prepared for threatened or candidate species in Alberta's parklands and prairies. The program will also provide resources to implement Alberta's portion of the Prairie Conservation Action Plan.

The Wildlife Act and regulations was proclaimed on April 1st and new regulations came into effect on that date.

Four years of intensive debate and discussion went into preparation of the regulations, with a leading role played by the Fish and Wildlife Advisory Council. Composed of representatives of 27 organizations interested in fish and wildlife matters, the council serves as a forum through which public interest groups may participate to ensure that the government's fish and wildlife policies and programs take account of user needs and sensitivities.

Following is a summary of some of the major changes covered by the new regulations:

1. Increased Penalties and Suspensions

Greater penalties and longer suspension periods allow courts to impose penalties reflecting the seriousness of wildlife violations. The maximum penalty now stands at \$100 000, up from \$5 000.

2. Licensing and Improved Hunter Training

All first-time hunters now must pass a hunter examination. Youths under 16 will be issued a license only when they present written authorization from a parent or guardian. The minimum age for game bird hunters has been lowered from 14 to 12 years for individuals who have successfully completed a Conservation and Hunter Education course and passed the associated examination.

3. Better Control of Guiding and Outfitting and Protection of the Resource

As of January 1st, 1988, all out-of-province big game hunters are required to be accompanied by a guide, regardless of where they hunt.

4. Improved Definition of Wildlife

Three categories of animals are created under the Wildlife Act:

Wildlife — animals considered to be native to Alberta.

Excluded — domestic animals or pets.

Exotic — all remaining species.

The new Wildlife Act focuses its attention on indigenous wildlife and exotic animals that could impact this resource and society.

5. Firearm Safety

The previous prohibition against discharging firearms from prescribed roadways is extended to prohibit discharge of firearms (except shotguns used to hunt game birds under the authority of a licence) along developed road allowances throughout the province. This change includes improvement districts and special areas, in addition to the existing counties and municipal districts.

6. Possession and Transfer of Wildlife Products

Possession and transfer of some wildlife products obtained from hunting big game under a big game license are now permitted. This allows the disposal of parts of harvested big game previously wasted. Traditional uses of big game are now accommodated. Handicrafts made from hides, for example, can now legally be sold. Hunters with more than one animal mount, or individuals who inherit animal mounts, now may dispose of them. The Act allows gifts of legally hunted big game and game birds, taken by a licensed hunter.



HABITAT

The Buck for Wildlife (BFW) Program continued to implement a number of diverse habitat projects, with both public and private sector participation. Program expenditures were restrained to maintain \$3 million in the fund at all times, which will result in considerable interest income to the fund and will allow commencement of future major program initiatives. The Fish and Wildlife Division works closely with the Alberta Forest Service, Alberta Environment and Alberta Agriculture to ensure habitat development projects are implemented on a provincial scale.

The Wildlife Habitat Development Program approved 169 projects affecting over 15 000 ha at a cost of \$2.1 million. Of this, \$600 000 in grants was provided to non-government organizations to carry out local projects.

At the end of its second year, the Landowner Habitat Project has engaged almost 100 landowners to retain over 8 000 ha of valuable wildlife habitat on their property. Estimates for the third and final year indicate 30 000 ha of wildlife habitat will be retained.

A three-year co-operative agreement with the Eastern Irrigation District was signed to secure and improve habitat in conjunction with irrigation canal rehabilitation in the Brooks area. This agreement involves a commitment of up to \$1.5 million from the Buck for Wildlife Fund. In 1987, 12 projects affecting 482 ha were initiated.

A total of 88 fisheries habitat development projects were undertaken at a cost of \$1.98 million and covering over 1 405 ha of lake/pond surface and 139 km of stream. Of these projects, 79 have been completed, with 40 being implemented by sportsmen's groups like the Alberta Fish and Game Association and Trout Unlimited. Project expenditures for this fiscal year will approach \$1.1 million, with \$150 000 in grants going to sportsmen's groups to implement volunteer projects.

Future plans for Fisheries Habitat Development programs will concentrate on protecting and enhancing wild, self-sustaining fish populations, with effort focused on trout streams in western Alberta and perch, pike, and walleye waters in other areas of the province.

No Fisheries Access sites were developed in 1987 but maintenance of 57 existing sites continued with assistance from local authorities and interest groups.

Under the Habitat Assessment Program, staff evaluate all resource development permits and their effect on fish and wildlife populations/habitat. Resource recommendations are then made on design and mitigation measures. This program also provides input into river basin planning and assesses pesticide spraying programs, industrial resource development, water resource development, Crown land reservations and other habitat protection matters.

The Division has increased its input into timber harvesting activities due to continued timber industry expansion. Field staff review logging plans to minimize adverse effects and maximize habitat enhancement opportunities. Special attention is given to old growth forests, woodland caribou, herbicide proposals and access development.

The Instream Flow Needs Program made progress in 1987 through collecting data on the Belly, St. Mary and Waterton rivers. Data will be analyzed and recommendations made for maintaining flows for fish maintenance. Flow studies on Pekisko Creek determined suitable flow regimes for spawning Bow River rainbow trout.

Negotiations were completed during the year for donation of the Cross property to the Alberta government. Mr. and Mrs. A.R. (Sandy) Cross donated approximately 820 ha (2000 acres) of prime wildlife habitat, about 10 km southwest of Calgary, to be used for wildlife conservation, outdoor education and nature interpretation. In thanking Mr. and Mrs. Cross for their generosity, Hon. LeRoy Fjordbotten, Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, said this gift was the largest single private donation of land in Alberta's history.



ENFORCEMENT

A total of 7 919 problem wildlife complaints were handled in 1987, an 11.4 per cent reduction from the previous year. The complaints dealt with beaver (2 540), bear (1 902), deer (177), wolf (106), elk (57), and other animals (3 137).

There were seven dangerous bear incidents during the year, an increase of 40 per cent over 1986. Nine grizzly bears and seven black bears were captured, with six grizzly and two black bears relocated and the balance destroyed.

Forty-one claims were received for shot livestock. Of these, 16 were paid and 16 rejected, with nine still pending. Compensation payments totalled \$12 088.69.

The Outdoor Observer hotline — established in 1985 to make it easier for citizens to report fish and wildlife offences — received over 3 850 calls from April to December, 1987, an increase of 687 over 1986. The largest increases, averaging 246 calls more than the previous year, were in the areas of illegal hunting and fishing or general information.

Forensic Science handled 106 cases, of which 70 were initiated by Alberta Fish and Wildlife. The other 36 cases provided assistance to the Yukon, other Western provinces, and Parks Canada.

Enforcement Operations activities are detailed in the following tables. Table II shows a five-year comparison of contacts, both user and nonuser. Table III shows a five-year comparison of prosecutions. Table IV shows a five-year comparison of warrants. Table V shows a five-year comparison of occurrences handled by the Division.

TABLE II
USER AND NONUSER CONTACTS,
1983/84 - 1987/Dec. 15

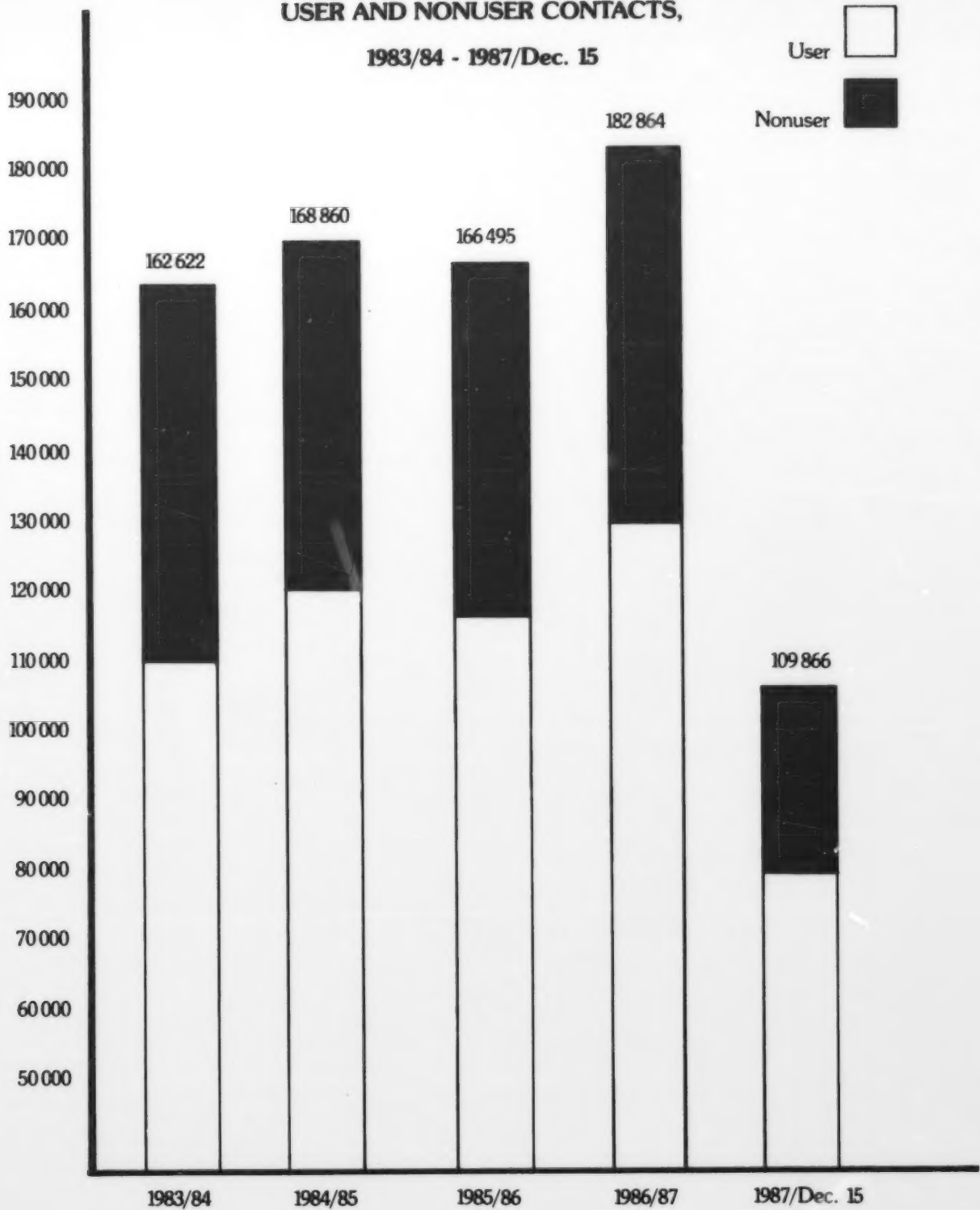


TABLE III
PROSECUTIONS, 1983/84 - 1987/Dec. 15

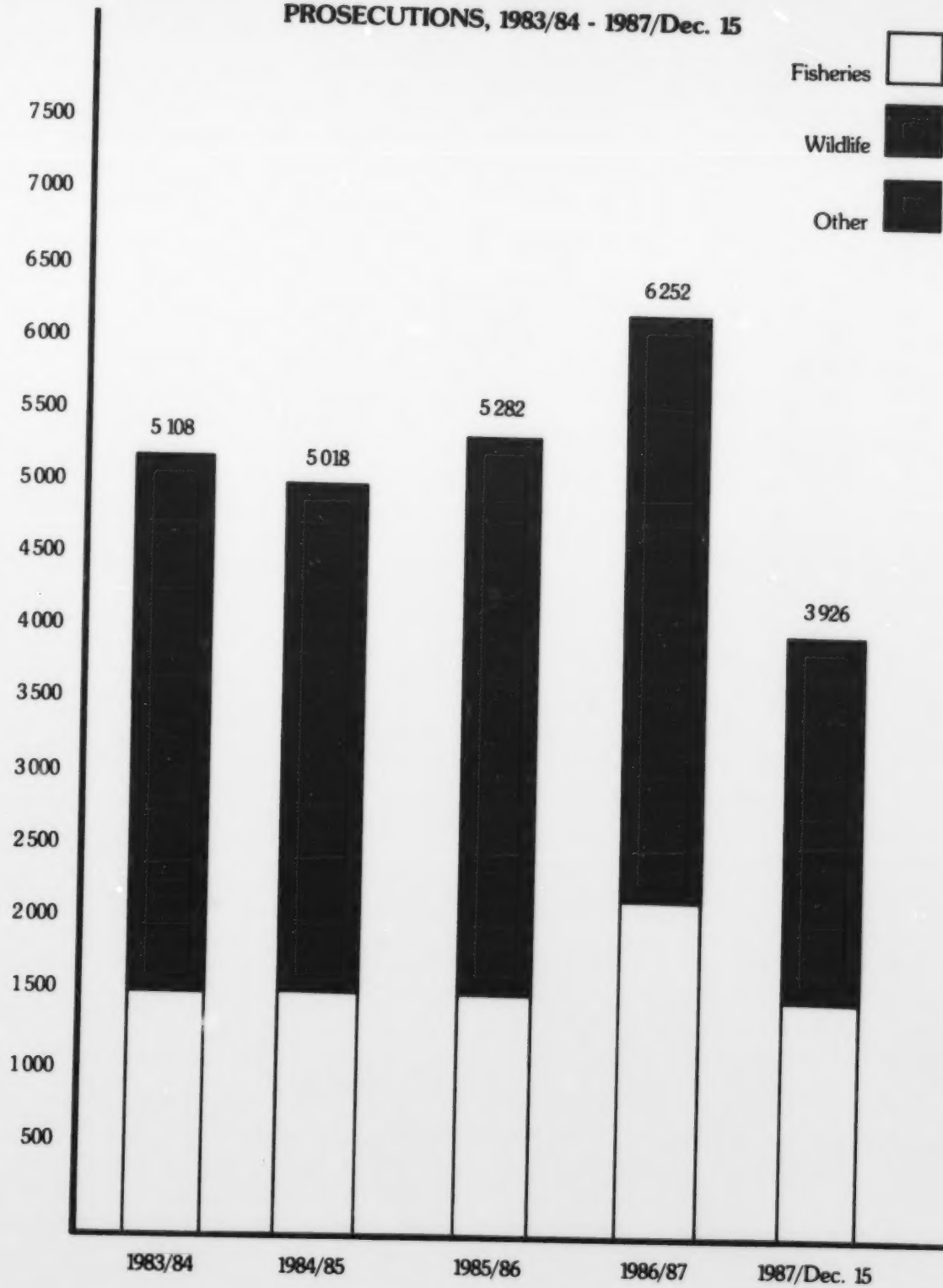


TABLE IV
WARNINGS, 1983/84 - 1987 Dec. 15

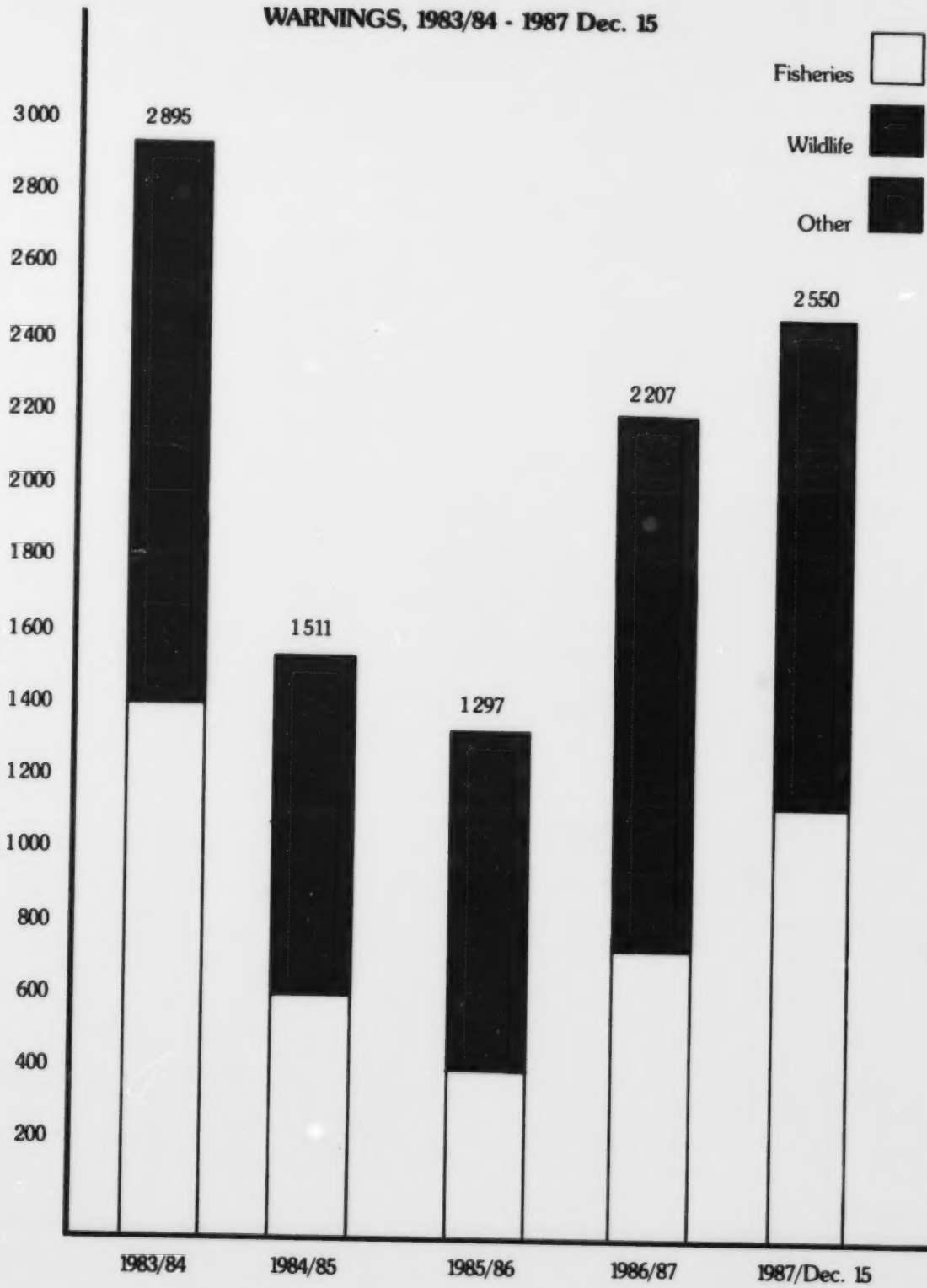


TABLE V
OCCURRENCES, 1983/84 - 1987/Dec. 15

